

Undergraduate Research  
*Discovering Content through Process*

By

Garrett Coressel

The Department of Art  
The Ohio State University

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I use a method of transferring weathered table surfaces from drawing rooms onto paper using acetone. These surfaces have a distinct quality that I felt could be used in making a dynamic background. Planes of varnish that transfer onto the paper have a certain level of depth that creates a washed out sense of positive and negative space. In many instances I found that pencil, paint, and ink were able to react with the acetone as well. This highlighted the idea that I was collaborating, in a sense, with my peers. Some of the sketches and notes began to show up in my studies: a scratch from a utility knife, small bits of leftover tape, or ink stains on the table surface. These marks were not made by my hand but collected to make up what is now a drawing. Former students of drawing classes account for every mark in this work. It was their residual imprints that caught my attention. At first this was beyond my comfort level to have some variable notes and doodles in the transfer since I was most interested in the scratched grid-like varnish. As I spent more time making the work I was more comfortable allowing them to have a presence. They are a history of this surface. People were in these rooms long before me and had a hand in every mark that interested me. How old are these tables? How many projects were conceived here?

Conceptually I aimed to discover content through process. By that I mean that I knew the aesthetic that I wanted and how to achieve it. However, there was a void of concept within this process. I think of it as if I had a point of departure in terms of process, and an unclear vision of how my content would develop. It has been important for me to work around a central idea when making work. In much of my previous work I would develop a drawing or painting based primarily on the fundamentals of the medium. Color or technique informed most of my content. And the process of painting was about responding to marks as they develop. The grid format that becomes apparent visually is a derivation of what I like to refer to as the perceptual grid. The perceptual grid is the natural tendency of

someone to organize visual information in terms of perceived horizontal and vertical lines. This tool is useful in resolving issues of volume or perspective within a 2-dimensional plane with implied lines. The literal lines that become the ground within the work are a version of this concept. However, in my transfers the means in which these lines were produced are random. No two vertical lines are perfectly parallel and there are a significant number of diagonal or imperfect lines that show up within the transfers.

With this project I knew I would be able to spend more time with the work; much more than a normal quarter long painting class. So my goal was to change my approach and methods in order to discover something new within art making for myself.

In the earlier studies with this method I noticed that when I went to bring a pastel or charcoal pencil to the paper, I was still working in the same manner that is typical of my work. As I began to recognize these surfaces differently, I slowly became more hesitant to use the same approach. I had not thought about the time it took for a surface to weather and the contributions to its weathering. I started this recognition and began to draw much differently than the initial studies. I noted the idea of collaboration with others. So I tried to draw with the surface instead of over it. This meant that I had to simplify and even hold back from my normal tendencies. There were also many transfers that were able to stand alone without a reinvestigation. These untouched pieces had element of interest like an absurd note or a tag that gained interest by itself.

I started to look for surfaces that interested me, primarily on wooden tables. Since I had found a way to put the texture of a varnished piece of wood onto paper, I knew that I could find ways to make an unusual drawing by doing so. With a process like this one there is a certain level of chance involved. I am attracted to chance-based techniques and how I may or may not be able to manipulate or control them to some extent. Repetition comes to mind as well with this approach. Being able to spend more

time with one process will, over time, start a conversation with the work. Viewing the work as a whole raises questions of pattern perhaps. Isolating a piece as an individual may bring material to the forefront. From this conversation I can add and subtract elements as I choose.

The physical act of making these is also just as significant. Personally I see this as necessary to my work. Climbing around table tops and pouring acetone in specific areas is an extremely engaging act. With rags and what I like to call good old fashioned “elbow grease,” I relentlessly rub the acetone into the paper until it begins to weld to the table. This constant pressure is what becomes the act of drawing. Trying to incorporate my entire body in making things produces some of the most interesting results in my opinion. It gives me the freedom to react to a large transfer as it is happening. I work flat and climb around the paper as I am focusing on certain areas. It may be linked to my athletic background, for in many ways, when approaching a project, I feel as if I am entering an arena in which I will be challenged. After the initial transfer has been made, I move toward a more traditional drawing approach with pastel. This also becomes a very physically engaging task. Using my hands and fingers, I blend the medium until the “artists’ hand” is no longer apparent. In some cases I make representational drawings that maintain a vague kind of quality. Doing this makes the line work and planes of color become just as significant as the image itself. This approach began to change as I started to think about the textured paper not as a background, but as a collaborative work. Addressing the lines as if I have been given a drawing to work with as opposed to a background to draw on altered the manner in which I would use my own marks. So in these trials I stepped back a bit. I was attempting to draw with the grid and balance the work instead.